

<p>LIVES 1ST</p> <p>Exploring The Bible & Biblical Heritages</p> <p>TOV</p>	<p>VALUES</p> <p>Wisdom ~ Justice ~ Order</p> <p>STANDARD</p>	<h1>Exploring the Bible & Biblical Heritages</h1> <p>FEBRUARY 2023</p>
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Be Wise, Establish Justice, and Maintain Order

By Jim Myers



The Stele of Hammurabi was found in 1901 in excavations at Susa, an ancient city in Iran. It was erected in 1780 BCE as a monument of Hammurabi, King of Babylon (1792-1750 BCE). In the relief, Shamash, the god of justice, is seated on a throne. A rod and ring are in the right hand of Shamash, which he is extending towards the King Hammurabi. Notice that the king is standing in a subservient pose. Below the relief is a list of 282 legal sayings embedded between the prologue and the epilogue.

It is written in the Old Babylonian dialect of Akkadian.¹ The last positively identified Akkadian text comes from the 1st century CE. The ability to read the Akkadian language faded into the distant past, until Carsten Niebuhr began to rediscover it in 1767.² As other scholars became involved and published their findings, the knowledge base increased significantly. But it was the work of the brilliant scholar and translator George Smith that caught the attention of a whole new audience. In 1872 he translated and published *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. In it he found the story of a great flood, a ship caught on a mountain and a bird sent out in search of dry land, with a Noah-like figure. A link between the ancient Akkadian texts and the stories in the Hebrew Scriptures similar to the Western world.³ As more tablets were discovered and translated, more stories like stories in the Bible entered academic and non-academic discussions.

The Stele of Hammurabi was discovered only 29 years after *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was published. There was only a limited amount of information available to scholars at that

¹ [Code of Hammurabi - Wikipedia](#)

² [Akkadian language - Wikipedia](#)

³ [Epic Hero | History | Smithsonian Magazine](#)

time. So, based on their access to information about the Akkadian language, the scene at the top of the stele, and the list of 282 legal sayings embedded between the prologue and the epilogue, they concluded that the god Shamash was giving divine laws to King Hammurabi -- *just like Yahweh gave divine laws to Moses*. They also called the stele, "*The Laws of Hammurabi*" (*Law of Moses*).

However, as the inventory of ancient texts grew, scholars became increasingly familiar with the literature from the Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Assyrians. The common ground among these lists of legal sayings led to what is now a broad consensus regarding how they function. These lists are not intended to be comprehensive -- *they are what we can call "aspective."* They offer a wide variety of aspects pertaining to the topic of the list. This **accumulation of aspects** serves to produce **a sense of understanding of the field as a whole**. In a word, **the accumulated aspects provide wisdom**.

- *Medical lists provide wisdom for care providers about symptoms and treatments.*
- *Omen lists provide wisdom for the divination experts that would be applied to the day-to-day decisions they had to make as they advised the king.*
- *Proverbial sayings lists give wisdom for preserving order in society.*
- *Lexical lists provide wisdom for the scribes who had to deal with texts every day.*
- *Legal sayings lists provide wisdom for judges to decide on cases in their towns.*

When these lists are combined, they showcase the wisdom of the king to discern what justice will look like. They are **not the laws of the land**, they are **not legislative decrees**, and they **do not constitute a prescriptive code enforced in society**. The **king has not promulgated these as laws**, but **he has had them compiled to convey his wisdom** because, as the king designated by the gods, **his responsibilities are to be wise, establish justice, and maintain order on behalf of the gods**.

*Wisdom is the ability to perceive order and establish it.*⁴

Based on the above information, scholars realized they had been wrong in their interpretation of the relief at the top of the Stele of Hammurabi. The king is standing before the god Shamash, *the deity responsible for order and justice*. Hammurabi is accountable to the gods in general and Shamash in particular **to be a wise king as he establishes justice and maintains order in the land**.

⁴ *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* by John H. Walton & J. Harvey Walton © 2019; IVP Academic Press, Downers Grove, IL; pp. 32-33.

- *In the prologue and epilogue, Hammurabi recounts how he has been favored by the gods and installed by them and how he has established justice and maintained order by means of the wisdom they have granted him.*
- *The 282 legal sayings in the list are provided as evidence of his judicial wisdom. Some are actual verdicts of the king that have been handed down, while others are verdicts that would be delivered if such cases were to come before the king.*
- *Combined, the prologue, the 282 legal sayings, and the epilogue are there to give evidence of Hammurabi's wisdom. All people, as well as the gods, should consider the stele as proof that Hammurabi is indeed a wise king.⁵*

As scholars compared lists from different cultures, they identified things that were similar and different. Then, they did the same thing when they compared those lists to the Jewish Scriptures, beginning with the **Torah** – *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*. The first two **differences** they discovered are:

- *In the Torah there is **one God**, not many gods.*
- *In the first story in the Torah, **God is giving His wisdom to mankind**.*

Just like the lists in the writings of other cultures, lists in the Jewish Scriptures are not intended to be comprehensive -- *they are also “**aspective**.”* They offer a wide variety of aspects pertaining to the topic of the list. This **accumulation of aspects** serves to produce **a sense of understanding of the field as a whole**.

It is important to understand what is meant by the “**way of thinking**” that is found in the cultures of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Assyrians, and Israelites. All of these ancient writings have “**lists of legal sayings**” which were not intended to be viewed as **comprehensive legislation** -- *they are “**aspective**”* – which means they offer “**a wide variety of aspects pertaining to the topic of the list**.” This **accumulation of aspects from all of the lists** serve to produce an understanding of the field as a whole – **combined they provide wisdom**.

When we apply this information to the Hebrew text of the Jewish Scriptures, it transforms the way those texts were read. Just like the lists found in the other ancient texts, the lists in the Jewish Scriptures were not intended to be viewed as comprehensive legislation. **It is their combined aspects that provide wisdom**. Below is an example of this way of thinking applied to a list we call the “**Ten Commandments**.” There are three different

⁵ *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* by John H. Walton; p. 35.

versions of the Ten Commandments – *Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant*. The list below is the Jewish version (Exodus 20:1-17).

1. *I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*
2. *You shall have no other gods besides Me.*
3. *You shall not swear falsely by the name of Yahweh your God.*
4. *Remember the Shabbat and keep it holy.*
5. *Honor your father and your mother.*
6. *You shall not murder.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
8. *You shall not steal.*
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
10. *You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

What I called “*commandments*” are actually “**legal sayings**.” They are not “*laws or comprehensive legislation*.” I was taught to view each commandment as a standalone commandment. I would read Number 8 --- “*You shall not steal*.” – and look up other things in the Bible about “*stealing and theft*.” But, that was not what the author or members of ancient audiences did. By the time they made it to Exodus 20 in the Torah, they clearly understood the cornerstone principles of the Creator’s wisdom:

Be wise, establish justice, and maintain order.

As I said above, they viewed the verses above from Exodus 20 as a list of **ten legal sayings**. They were **aspects** that had to be viewed together to discover the wisdom embedded in the list. Ask questions like the ones below to find wisdom.

- *What effects does “stealing” have on “justice and order?”*
- *How does “you shall not steal” relate to “honor your father and mother?”*
- *How does “you shall not steal” relate to “remember the Shabbat?”*

- How does “you shall not steal” relate to “I am Yahweh your God”?
- How does “you shall not steal” relate to “you shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor”?

They would discuss their answers and then expand their search to other list and stories in the Torah:

- “How does ‘you shall not steal’ relate to ‘you shall not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil’?” (Genesis 2)
- “How does ‘you shall not steal’ relate to “he oppresses the poor and needy . . . he does not return what he took in pledge?” (Ezekiel 18:12)

This is the way of thinking we find in the teachings of the Jewish Jesus. Take a moment to consider how you would answer the above questions related to “*you shall not steal.*” What impact could that way of thinking have on lives and institutions today?

The Lists of the Jewish Jesus

In the ancient world lists served a purpose -- **like dictionaries** -- today. When hearers or readers of ancient documents want to know what important words meant – *they looked for lists linked to them.* The teachings of the Jewish Jesus are linked to many lists, which make it possible for readers today to accurately understand his words.

For many years we have stressed the importance of identifying the Hebrew words Jesus spoke. Today there is a way for people who do not have the skill to work with Hebrew to increase the accuracy of their understanding of his words – (1) identify lists in his teachings; (2) *identify lists in Jewish Scriptures that are linked to his lists.* When people do this, a fog begins to lift and things they couldn’t see before began to appear. Let’s apply this information to the New King James Version of Matthew 25:34-36 below. Can you see a list in the words of Jesus below?

“³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’”

Did you see the list? Let me share the list I see:

1. gave food to hungry
2. gave drink to thirsty
3. took stranger in
4. gave cloths to naked
5. visited sick
6. went to prisoner

Before Jesus gave the list above, he said this: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* *“Blessed of My Father”* reveals the source of the list in the teachings of Jesus, Genesis 1:28.

“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Do you see the list in Genesis 1:28?

1. be fruitful and multiply
2. fill the earth and subdue it (the earth)
3. have **dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth

Instead of **“dominion,”** the Hebrew word could have been translated as:

- **Rule over** fish, birds, and all living things on the earth.
- **Tread on** fish, birds, and all living things on the earth.

Picture those translations in your mind. These translations did not make sense to me, so I kept looking and found the answer in *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Volume 3* (p. 1190): *“The basic meaning of the verb is not to rule; the word actually denotes **the traveling around of the shepherd with his flock.**”*

*“Be My **shepherds** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

Now let's return to Matthew 25 using the information above. Jesus adds another list to highlight what he is teaching.

Which List Describes Things Shepherds Do?

List #1

1. gave food to hungry
2. gave drink to thirsty
3. took stranger in
4. gave cloths to naked
5. visited sick
6. went to prisoner

List #2

1. did not give food to hungry
2. did not give drink to thirsty
3. did not take stranger in
4. did not give cloths to naked
5. did not visit sick
6. did not go to prisoner

Without identifying the lists Jesus used, and understanding how they were used in ancient cultures, the last sentence in the parable (Matthew 25:46) would not make sense:

*And these (second list) will go away into everlasting punishment,
but the righteous (first list) will go away into eternal life.*

How many human lives were affected by people who failed to be the Creator's shepherds? *The seriousness of the punishment reveals how serious their failure was to the Creator!*

Keep in mind that this is a **parable, not a divine commandment or law**. Below are the purposes parables were used in the Jewish culture:

1. *Prompt people to see the world in a different way.*
2. *Challenge people to examine the hidden aspects of their own lives.*
3. *Bring to the surface unasked questions and reveal answers people have always known but refused to acknowledge.*
4. *Remind, provoke, confront and disturb people, so they will focus on **actions they needed to take**.*¹

The point I want you to understand is this: *The eternal destinies of the people in the parable were determined by their actions, not their beliefs!* **BHC**

February Memorials

In Loving Memory

**PHYLLIS
WYRE**

d. February 8, 1998

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**ALBERTA
HARLESS
MYERS**

b. August 18, 1887
d. February 5, 1979

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**GLORY ANN
HODGES
ROSS**

b. January 25, 1978
d. February 19, 2008

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to seek
those qualities of mind and heart
which they shared when we walked
life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion.*

*As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we
remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor
Reflections - The New Mahzor –
The Prayer Book Press)

Remembering those who came before
us is a very important part of the
Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is
our privilege to honor them in this
newsletter and on the BHC Memorials
Page of our website –
<http://www.biblicalheritage.org>.

If you would like to add a memorial for a
loved one, send us their information.
There is no charge, but donations are
accepted. Space in this newsletter is
limited to one page.

In Loving Memory

**Maxine
"Granny"
Davis**

b. November 9, 1923
d. February 22, 2019

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JAMES
HENRY
MYERS**

b. September 6, 1881
d. February 13, 1953

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**REED
DUNCAN
HAMILTON**

b. October 13, 1945
d. February 5, 2016

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

May their memory be a blessing and an inspiration!